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ABSTRACT

Using guidelines established for alternative certification, Tarleton State University (Texas) has developed an accelerated teacher education program that allows nontraditional students to enter the teaching profession in an expedient and professional manner. The Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education (TMATE) was initiated and established to attract new talent to the teaching profession, help alleviate a projected teacher shortage, support the educational reform movement in Texas, and promote improvement in the process of teacher education. The program has nine components that ensure the program's effectiveness and allow highly qualified and motivated college graduates to enter the teaching field. The elements of TMATE include: (1) an advisory board; (2) screening; (3) core curriculum; (4) mentor teachers; (5) training of the mentor teachers; (6) field experience; (7) collegiality; (8) evaluation; and (9) consistent redesign. Interns are prepared through rigorous summer course work, and professional growth is nurtured throughout the year of induction, utilizing trained public school mentors and university faculty. The performance of interns, as reviewed by school principals, is consistently rated as equal to or better than that of other beginning teachers. (Author/LL)

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Developing a University-Based Alternative Teacher Certification Program

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Abstract

Using guidelines established for alternative certification, Tarleton State University has developed an accelerated teacher education program that allows non-traditional students to enter the teaching profession in an expedient, yet professional, manner. The Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education (TMATE) program employs nine components that ensure the program's effectiveness, and allows highly qualified, motivated individuals to enter the teaching field. Apart from many of the well-known, controversial alternative certification programs, TMATE prepares the "interns" through rigorous summer course work, and then nurtures their professional growth throughout the year of induction by using trained public school mentors and university faculty. As viewed by school principals, the performance of TMATE interns is consistently rated as "equal to" or "better than" other beginning teachers

Developing a University-Based Alternative Teacher Certification Program

Alternative certification began to receive national attention during the educational reforms that started in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In his inaugural address to the nation in January, 1989, President Bush proposed alternative certification as a means of continuing nationwide educational reform. The limelight and public attention that alternative certification attracted has caused some teacher education institutions to hesitate in the development of programs that address the needs of the non-traditional teacher education candidates.

Because there are many programs that call themselves "alternative" and avoid the pedagogical preparation of the classroom teacher, it is necessary to make a distinction between "alternative" certification and "irregular" certification. In defending the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education's stance supporting alternative certification programs, David Imig (1989), Executive Director of AACTE, defined irregular certification as a teacher preparation program that bypasses pedagogical preparation. Furthermore, Imig stated that irregular certification programs have a "heavy anti-teacher education bias" and they "are nothing more than short courses for prospective teachers and are premised on the assumptions that anyone can teach" (p. 2). Yet, Imig distinguished alternative programs as "[p]rograms for ... non-traditional teacher candidates [that] are as rigorous as the programs for traditional students -- both content and expectations are similar" (p. 2).

Although the alternative certification programs in Texas operate primarily at the public school campus level, not all programs are based at the public school. The Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education (TMATE) program, a university based alternative certification program, was initiated at Tarleton State University to attract new talent to the teaching profession, to help alleviate a projected teacher shortage, to support the educational reform movement in Texas, and to promote improvement in the process of teacher education.

After five years of operation, several aspects of TMATE became obvious as the components that have contributed greatly to its effectiveness. No one component "makes" the program. However, one missing component may be enough to significantly weaken the program. All components are intertwined and mutually dependent. The elements of TMATE include:

1. advisory board,
2. screening,
3. core curriculum,
4. mentor teachers,
5. training of the mentor teachers,
6. field experience,
7. collegiality,
8. evaluation, and
9. consistent redesign.

Advisory Board

University-based teacher certification programs that operate with a field-based, on-the-job-training component require the cooperation and collaboration of public school personnel. Therefore, it is imperative that constant oversight, collaboration, and planning involve both interested parties: the public schools and the university. TMATE operates under the guidance of an advisory board consisting of university and public school personnel. This board is charged to 1) advise the TMATE Director on matters regarding the screening of candidates, procedures for pre-internship and on-going training, and procedures for admitting interns to the program that may not be covered policies established by the state board or TMATE, 2) grant full-admission to TMATE applicants, and 3) advise the appropriate university personnel when law or policy are not followed, or when policy needs to be changed to enhance the effectiveness of the program.

Screening

Selection of individuals who show promise for success in the classroom is of vital importance in an alternative certification program. Applicants must demonstrate the academic ability to succeed as well as demonstrate enthusiasm, determination, dependability, and a personality that meshes well with the goals of the school district.

Most alternative certification programs utilize a single screening process where the school district maintains minimal academic qualifications in selecting the applicant to meet a specific district need. TMATE uses a collaborative approach involving a dual screening process which requires applicants to be accepted for

graduate study at Tarleton. Concurrently, the school district evaluates the applicant according to district goals and district need. The dual screening process shares the authority and responsibility of the intern selection between the school district and the university.

The first step in the screening process involves the university. Each applicant is screened on his/her prior academic record. It is at this point that the necessary academic background in the content area is determined.

Admission to the TMATE program requires:

1. The completion of a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited university,
2. Appropriate hours in each certification area (as determined by the state accrediting agency),
3. A grade point average of 2.75 overall and in each certification area,
4. Passing scores on all three sections of the state mandated examination of academic skills, and
5. An acceptable score on the Graduate Record Examination.

Provided that a school district has a need for a teacher in a given content area (elementary classroom, bilingual, mathematics, etc.), the district may choose to interview and sponsor one of the conditionally admitted TMATE interns. The importance of the interview cannot be overstated. The interview process allows the school districts to select interns that philosophically mesh with the goals of the district. Upon the successful completion of the program, the district and University will jointly recommend the intern for certification.

Core Curriculum

Failure to prepare a beginning teacher pedagogically for the classroom was a common mistake made by alternative certification programs in their formative years. Because it is a teacher training institution, Tarleton State University wanted to avoid this mistake at all cost. Therefore, when TMATE was being developed, an intensive core curriculum was made an integral part of the program. The preparation of the intern for the teaching act involves pre-teaching course work, seminars during the internship, and preparatory course work. Each segment addresses specific needs of the TMATE intern.

The cumulative course work for the elementary-level intern and special education intern is greater than that of the secondary-level intern. This is attributed to the early childhood component which requires additional academic preparation and the specific needs of those individuals teaching special education students. The elementary-level intern is eventually certified to teach in the pre-kindergarten classroom and kindergarten classroom as well as grades 1 through 6, and the special education teacher is eventually certified to teach special education children in grades K through 12.

University course work in the TMATE program serves three purposes: (l) to prepare the applicant for the internship: (2) to extend and enrich the professional preparation of the intern: and (3) to count for credit toward a master's degree in education. TMATE intern training for instruction in the classroom is predicated upon the lesson cycle and effective teaching practices as outlined in the Model for Effective Teaching and Supervision (METS) as developed by Dr. Jim Boyd (1985).

Preparatory Course Work

Prior to beginning the internship, TMATE interns complete an intensive summer program designed to prepare them for planning and delivering lessons according to a model for effective teaching, to manage the classroom environment, and to apply principles of curriculum development and educational assessment. Elementary interns receive additional training in methods of teaching reading and in the assessment and remediation of reading disabilities. Special education interns receive six hours of course work in reading and in the assessment and remediation of reading difficulties as well as nine hours of special education specific course work.

Laboratory School

For three weeks in the summer prior to the internship, TMATE interns develop and deliver teaching units to elementary and secondary age students (ages 6 through 14) on the Tarleton State University campus. While delivering the teaching units, the interns are script-taped and video-taped for the purpose of analyzing their teaching performance. This is the first actual teaching experience for most of the interns, and they typically accept the analysis openly and professionally.

Monthly Seminars

During the internship, TMATE interns are required to attend a monthly seminar for credit on the Tarleton campus. The purpose of the seminar is to provide a forum for interns to share their experiences and reflect on their accomplishments in relation to professional growth goals which are formulated by

each intern. The seminar has proven valuable in providing a support network for the interns during their first year of teaching. Feelings of isolation and frustration, which are commonly experienced by beginning teachers, are minimized by the seminar and other support features of TMATE.

The first seminar is scheduled in September after the interns have been in the classroom for approximately three weeks. This seminar is attended by both interns and their mentors for the purpose of setting professional growth goals for the intern. Through a day of discussion and collaboration with their mentors, the interns are required to identify their personal strengths and weaknesses, and to transform these qualities into professional growth goals. Interns also collaborate with each other to establish goals for the TMATE class. The goal setting seminar helps establish a direction for the TMATE class, and it also provides a "glue" to help the class maintain a sense of unity while the individual interns are scattered through numerous school districts.

Supporting Course Work

Upon completion of the internship, secondary interns take additional course work to help them gain an understanding of the secondary school curriculum and to facilitate the development of a philosophy of education. For elementary interns, the summer following the first year of internship focuses on methods of delivering instruction in language arts, social studies, mathematics and science. A secondary objective of the second summer is to prepare interns for the state mandated

certification examinations required of all persons applying for a Texas teaching certificate.

Mentor Teachers

The induction of the alternative certification participant is of critical importance. As with all beginning teachers, the participant needs adequate guidance, support, and assistance. This induction is best conducted with the utilization of an experienced "mentor teacher."

The appointment of a mentor teacher is a very important element of the TMATE program. The mentor must be on the career ladder, must teach in the same field or at the same level as the intern, and should be recognized by his/her professional peers as a "master teacher." A mentor should be one who has demonstrated a commitment to the teaching profession and has shown an interest in the development of beginning teachers.

TMATE uses a cooperative approach to the induction and supervision of the intern. Although the greatest amount of direct supervision and assistance comes from the school district, the university figures prominently in the training of school personnel to assist with teacher induction and supervision.

In the fall of the school year the TMATE intern undergoes 2 formal peer coaching sessions by the university supervisor, and 2 formal peer coaching sessions by the mentor teacher. This provides feedback to the intern in a formative, non-judgmental manner. This is coupled with the state mandated Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS) evaluation process which culminates in a summative judgment of the intern's performance.

The intern's professional growth is primarily dependent upon the relationship and the assistance of the mentor teacher. The mentor teacher conducts regularly scheduled visits in the intern's classroom and makes positive suggestions for enhancing instruction in the classroom. Also, the intern makes regularly scheduled visits into the classroom of the mentor teacher and observes effective teaching practices. After each visit the mentor teacher and the intern conference to discuss the observed activities.

Upon the completion of the two formal peer coaching visits, the university supervisor continues to meet with the intern on a regular basis. However, these visits are typically limited to words of encouragement and informal problem solving activities.

Mentor Training

As stated earlier, a critical component of an effective alternative certification program is the mentor-intern relationship. This relationship must not be left to chance. Mentors must be trained on the social, physical, emotional, and professional needs of a beginning teacher. Too, peer assistance or peer coaching skills must be developed and enhanced through training in order to effectively promote the induction of the alternative certification program intern.

Prior to the beginning of the school year, mentors are introduced to their role and responsibilities in a workshop conducted on the Tarleton campus. The workshop focuses on the needs of beginning teachers and emphasizes peer coaching as a means of instructional assistance. The overriding goal of the training

is providing the assistance to the mentor for duties that will be incurred during the ensuing year. The primary task of the mentor is to serve as a facilitator of learning for the intern. The internship is the most important phase of professional development, but the tendency of most interns is to focus all of their attention on surviving the day-to-day demands of the classroom. Reflection, problem solving, and observation and interaction with experienced teachers are all needed in order for the internship to become a growth-promoting learning experience. Mentors are awarded a stipend for the successful completion of their duties with the induction of the intern.

Field Experience

During the period of internship, the intern is the teacher of record in the classroom and a student at the university. The interns receive six semester hours of credit for their internship and attend a seminar on the university campus one Saturday per month to discuss state legislated topics such as child abuse and neglect, professional ethics, etc., and areas of interest or need as determined by the state teacher appraisal instrument.

The field experiences are recorded in a journal. This journal is reflective in nature and designed to provide the intern with a forum for expression of thoughts and deeds during the year. The culminating activity of the journal is to summarize the year's experiences in a narrative.

Professional Collegiality

A component that has emerged as a result of the university-based design is intern collegiality. This collegiality, or team atmosphere, was not an initial expectation of the program, but has proven vital to the program's success. And, although collegiality can not be mandated, there are things that can be done to enhance the likelihood that it will occur.

Just as other professional schools (medical, legal, etc.) place their students through a program as a class, so does the university-based alternative certification program. The interns begin one summer, take the same course work together, and finish the ensuing summer. Through this professional model the interns gain an understanding of each other, and depend upon each other. A natural result of this model is an outgrowth of study groups and socials that provide the rope that keeps the program's components closely tied together. During the summer, many of the interns live on the university campus and, literally, within a few feet of each other.

Evaluation

How do we know when a program is effective? And, upon further analysis, how do we know if the program is providing the service it primarily intended? Is the program operating effectively? These are all questions that programs, alternative certification or otherwise, should ask of themselves. Failure to do so could justify the creation of another pedagogical bureaucracy that promotes mediocrity. In TMATE, evaluation is constant and multi-faceted. The interns are evaluated by principals, mentor teachers and university supervisors. Too, at every

turn the interns are required to make self evaluations and to be able to justify their resultant actions.

Principals were asked to evaluate teaching performance of TMATE interns in relation to the criteria of the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS). The instrument asked that the performance of TMATE interns be compared to that of other beginning teachers and that the results be reported in the following terms:

1. the TMATE intern performed better than most other beginning teachers,
2. the TMATE intern performed equal to most other beginning teachers, and
3. the TMATE intern performed worse than most other beginning teachers.

Of the total responses on the questionnaire, the performance of TMATE interns was rated "better than most other beginning teachers" in 41.7 percent of the evaluations, and performance was said to be "equal to other beginning teachers" in 55.9 percent of the ratings. In only 2.7 percent of the evaluations was the performance of TMATE interns rated as being "worse than most other beginning teachers."

Another measure of performance is the score obtained on the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET). Secondary interns take a test in the subject area in which they are being certified and elementary interns take a test covering the broad content of the elementary curriculum. To date, a passing score has been earned on the ExCET by 100 percent of the TMATE interns in the

elementary and special education components of the program. Passing scores have equalled or exceeded the state average in all but three instances. The 100 percent pass rate is a record which has been earned by very few teacher education programs in the state. Secondary-level interns have a 95+% pass rate on the first administration of the ExCET.

Concurrent with the intern evaluation, the program's procedural effectiveness and efficiency is evaluated by a committee of superintendents and the state education agency. Both the state agency and the advisory committee review the entirety of the program from classroom instruction through administrative operation.

Consistent Redesign

In order to maintain their effectiveness and relevance, alternative certification programs should not succeed in order to breed another bureaucracy, but should constantly criticize their purposes and respond pragmatically. To paraphrase an old adage, the only thing about an effective alternative certification program that does not change is change itself. The basic design of TMATE is that it is constantly being redesigned.

Utilizing the massive amounts of evaluative feedback from interns, principals, mentors, superintendents, and other alternative certification programs, an effective alternative certification program will make the appropriate changes to enable the program to be most productive. The problems encountered due to

confusion in the redesign are inconsequential when placed side-by-side with the increased effectiveness of the program brought on by constant program change.

Finally, the nature of the program requires that the University maintain practicality. The need that interns have to obtain useful, practical information necessitates that TMATE professors give practical and "real world" applications for the theory presented. TMATE interns are achievement-oriented and tend to be aggressive in the acquisition of useful information. Because of this, it has been said that TMATE classes have a tendency to "teach themselves."

Summary

Alternative teacher certification has its place in the current educational arena. And, it is incumbent upon university teacher education programs to incorporate high quality alternative programs for non-traditional teacher certification candidates. Universities considering alternative programs should consider the components of an effective university-based program; rigorous screening, induction of mentor teachers, mentor training, intense core curriculum, pragmatic field experience, professional collegiality, student and program evaluation, and the flexibility of program design.

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